Name: _____ Date: _____

Stephen Curry and the Three-Point Shot

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1364 words

Who is Stephen Curry? He is a point guard for the Golden State Warriors, born in Akron, Ohio, on March 14, 1988. Through early November 2026, he has made 4,275 three-point shots in regular-season games, more than anyone in NBA history. A three-point shot is one taken from behind a curved line, and it counts three points instead of two. This book asks how that line works, how a shooter practices for it, and how a league counts what happens behind it.

The NBA's line is an arc 23 feet 9 inches from the middle of the basket. At the sides, it turns into two straight lines, three feet from the sidelines, so a shot from the corner is shorter: 22 feet. A shot made on or inside the line counts two points. A shot made outside counts three, if the shooter has a foot outside the line and does not touch it. International rules and college both use 22 feet 1 3/4 inches.

Why is the far shot worth three? It is harder to make: far shots go in less often. The NBA says it added the three-point shot "as a way to reward players for making shots from long distance." In 2025-26, NBA teams made about 55 of every 100 shots from inside the line and about 36 of every 100 from outside it. By our arithmetic, an average two was worth 1.10 points and an average three was worth 1.08. The extra point just about pays for the extra misses. That keeps the choice between the two shots close.

The shot is younger than the NBA's own rule book. The American Basketball League tried a three-point line in 1961, when its leader, Abe Saperstein, said, according to the Wall Street Journal, "We must have a weapon and this is ours." The American Basketball Association used one from 1967. The NBA added the line for 1979-80, though many people called it a gimmick. Chris Ford of the Boston Celtics is credited with the first one, on October 12, 1979. That season, a team tried 2.8 threes a game.

Curry went to high school in Charlotte, North Carolina, but he was thin, about 160 pounds, and not many big colleges came for him. Davidson College began recruiting him hard in tenth grade. In his first two seasons there, the college three-point line was 19 feet 9 inches. For his third season, 2008-09, it moved back a foot, to 20 feet 9 inches. That is still three feet shorter than the NBA's line at the top.

In March 2008, No. 10 seed Davidson beat Gonzaga, Georgetown and a No. 3 seed, then lost to top seed Kansas, 59-57, in the Elite Eight. A win would have sent Davidson to the Final Four. Curry scored 40 points in the first game. On the last play, Kansas double-teamed him. He passed to a teammate, whose long shot missed. The Warriors picked him seventh in the 2009 NBA draft. Severe ankle injuries followed. Rehab after surgery in 2011 led him to his

trainer, Brandon Payne.

Practice is where the shot gets built. In the summer of 2021, Curry trained with Payne about five days a week, in three-hour sessions. Technology tracked each shot's path, its arc and how deep it went into the rim. A ball that did not drop through the middle of the rim counted as a miss, even if it went in. "Making shots in workouts is no longer good enough," Payne told NBA.com that October.

The rule had a cost. Curry told NBA.com that if he made ten shots outside that window, he had to do ten more. Then "it becomes a conditioning drill" for a tired player. He called it "a mental challenge of trying to be as perfect as possible." The drill kept the pressure of a game in a gym. Curry said he did not always master it, which left Payne with an odd job: telling Curry that a make was not good enough.

Fixes can be small. After a night in Utah when Curry made 9 of 20 shots, ESPN reported in 2015, he and Payne went over what went wrong. He had been overstepping with his right foot, which pulled his hips around and sent the ball long and to the left. He shortened that step a little. Payne also trains what he calls "overload," such as dribbling two basketballs at once. It teaches a player to do one job while watching another.

Then there is the arc. From the side, the hoop is a thin line. From above, it is a circle 18 inches wide. A ball is about 9.4 inches across. So a flat shot sees a narrow hoop and may not fit. A Virginia player, crediting his physics professor, said a launch angle under about 32 degrees will hit the front rim. The article does not say how the angle is measured. By our arithmetic, a ball falling at less than about 31 degrees cannot pass the rim untouched. These are two different angles.

Higher arcs forgive more. A physics professor at Virginia said, "If you have more arc, you have more leeway to make a mistake and still make nothing but net." Physics Today reported that a throw from the rim's own height would need 45 degrees. Real shooters release lower, so they launch higher, typically 52 to 59 degrees. Virginia's coach told the professor that his team checks players' arc with a camera. It hangs above the backboard. It is the same idea Curry's trainer tracked: not just whether the ball went in, but how.

Why is a longer shot harder? Look at where shots came from in 2025-26. From 10 to 16 feet, NBA players made about 45 of every 100. From behind the line, they made 36 of every 100. The corner three, the shortest at 22 feet, did better, going in 39 times in 100. Within three feet of the basket, shooters made about 70 of every 100. The data cannot prove that distance alone is the cause, since shot type and defenders differ, but the pattern is plain.

Teams count shots plainly. Every tried shot is a field goal attempt. Threes are counted apart, as 3PA for the tries and 3P for the makes. Three-point percentage is 3P divided by 3PA, so a player who makes 4 of 10 threes shoots .400. Free throws are counted separately. Through early November 2026, Curry has made 4,275 of 10,136. That is .422, or about 42 of every

100. The league's camera tracking of the ball and the players came from Second Spectrum from 2017-18 and has come from Hawk-Eye since 2023-24.

The records came in steps. Ray Allen set the single-season mark of 269 in 2005-06. In 2012-13, Curry made 272. In 2015-16, he broke his own record with 402, playing 79 games. That is about five threes every game, and about 45 of every 100 tries went in. Through early November 2026, no one has made more in a season. That year, all 131 voters named him Most Valuable Player. It was the first unanimous vote in the history of the award.

Then came the career record. On December 14, 2021, at Madison Square Garden, Curry made his second three of the game and passed Ray Allen to lead the NBA's all-time list. Allen had needed 1,300 games to set it. Curry needed 789. Then, on March 13, 2025, against the Sacramento Kings, he became the first player to make 4,000. ESPN reported a pump fake and a sidestep before he shot from the right wing, about 27 feet out, and made it.

By our arithmetic, more than half of Curry's shots, 10,136 of 19,264, are threes. He is 38 years old, and through early November 2026 he is still shooting them for the Warriors. Some people think the league now has too many threes. In December 2024, commissioner Adam Silver said some offenses look "sort of cookie cutter," but he would not call it a "so-called 3-point shooting issue." The line has not moved: 23 feet 9 inches at the top, 22 in the corners, and still worth three.

Questions

1. Why does the book say a three is worth three points?

A. The ball is heavier
B. Far shots go in less often
C. Shooters get more time

2. In summer 2021, what counted as a miss in Curry's tracked workouts?

A. Any shot that was blocked
B. A shot taken in the corner
C. A ball that did not drop through the middle of the rim

3. In "you have more leeway to make a mistake," what does leeway mean?

A. Room for error
B. A fast pass
C. A rule

4. Why does a flat shot have trouble going through the hoop?

A. The ball gets too heavy
B. The line is in the way
C. The hoop looks narrower than the ball

5. How is three-point percentage figured?

A. Threes made divided by games played
B. Threes made divided by threes tried
C. Threes tried divided by points

6. What was the NCAA three-point line in Curry's third season at Davidson?

A. 20 feet 9 inches
B. 22 feet
C. 19 feet 9 inches

Words to know

arc: curved path
gimmick: cheap trick
leeway: room for error
conditioning: fitness work
unanimous: all agreeing

Answer key: Stephen Curry and the Three-Point Shot

1. B. Far shots go in less often
2. C. A ball that did not drop through the middle of the rim
3. A. Room for error
4. C. The hoop looks narrower than the ball
5. B. Threes made divided by threes tried
6. A. 20 feet 9 inches